

**Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles**  
**Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 28, 2017 – Memorial Weekend**  
**Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister**

**Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35**

**For Reflection**

**“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”**  
— Anne Frank, Jewish Dutch writer (1929-1945)

**“I learned without her saying a word that there are truly many ways to pray, and lighting a candle is one of them.”**  
— Pat Schneider, American author, How the Light Gets in: Writing as a Spiritual Practice

**Wax and Fire**

**SPOILER ALERT: If you have not yet seen the last few episodes of “The Flash” please put in your ear plugs and sing to yourself. I am about to reveal this season’s denouement.**

In order to save his fiancé’s life, Barry Allen has to steal a power source from a high security building. He conscripts the help of bad guy Leonard Snart aka Captain Cold to do the break in. And the plot thickens when they discover King Shark is guarding the inner chamber. Flash wants to kill King Shark in order to grab the power source and save Ivy. But Snart (supposed bad guy) reminds Flash (supposed good guy) that he is a hero and heroes take the high road. They use basic biology and put King Shark to sleep long enough to do what they have to do.

In the process Snart gets trapped with King Shark just as he is waking up. Flash has the choice between leaving him to die or getting him out. He’s back in his hero mind and gets him out – leading to others seeing the Flash living out of his better self and responding to it. It is a redemption episode.

With a child engrossed in the superhero genre – getting myself sucked into a Tuesday night ritual of sorting out multiverses, time continuum breaches, fragments and paradoxes, the speed force and its prison – I was thrilled to encounter a value system that placed love and compassion above hate and revenge.

The ultimate theological moments of the season, however, came after this. Not only one, but two characters on two separate occasions sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. HR, out of guilt and love of friends, dies in place of Iris. And Barry aka The Flash walks into the Speed Force Prison in order to save his friends, his city, his friends. Holy moly – what a (rather drawn out but) great moment.

Now what the heck – you might ask – does this have to do with **Psalm 68**?

The Psalms are some of the best literature in this book of ours. They have the high language of praise and joy, the angst of lament and despair. They also express the depths of our anger and hatred of one another. What is wonderful about these ancient Hebrew poems is that they assume that G-d can take whatever we can dish out. When we are at our worst, we can lay our souls bare to the One Who Made us and know that we won't lose the Love We Lean On.

This Psalm not only praises G-d – but it prays for the worst to happen to our enemies – who are, of course, the enemies of our G-d.

1 Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. **2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God.**

It was that last image that stuck with me when I read the texts for this week. “As wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before G-d.” This is how I have been feeling ever since November 8<sup>th</sup> 2016. I have been stress eating and railing against the machine that brought King Shark into the oval office. I have been furious with a certain political party and all its members – but most of all those who supported and continue to support the policies of this current congressional majority.

The idea of certain people being indicted and impeached and arrested and punished has driven my imagination. The image of cockroaches running away from the light of justice is on a loop in my head. And this idea that the wicked will melt – like the West Witch of Oz under water – or wax under flame – is very satisfying.

I have been so angry and hateful in my heart and it has taken its toll. And I have become concerned that I am not a very nice person – self-righteous rather than righteous – judgmental rather than conciliatory. This is not the kind of person anyone would want as a spiritual role model – let alone the mother of a 10-year-old who needs to know how to take the high road. This is not the kind of person that Michelle Obama was referring to when she said, “When they go low, we go high.”

So, when Captain Cold reminded The Flash that he was a hero and needed to make better choices, I heard him. And I realized that the wax that needed to melt was the hatred in my own soul. And I remembered that in the melting of that hardened wax, light is created – the light of hope – and spirit – and the possibility of redemption.

When I was looking for ways to reflect on melting wax, I came across this quotation from the journal of Anne Frank:

“Look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.”

Of all the people who could have given in to fear and hatred, who could have given up in the face of such evil – this girl reminded herself, and thus all of us, that the light – the fire – has power against the darkness. The light defines the darkness as something OTHER than itself – creates a boundary between it and self.

And that is the boundary we need to create every day. We need to make that choice multiple times a day – to light that fire which will melt our hardened hearts – to spark that fire that will push back the darkness – to choose love and compassion over hatred and revenge.

When Greg Gianforte, congressional candidate in Montana, assaulted a newspaper reporter the night before his special election, the news hit social media and I was appalled. But not as appalled as I was this morning when I heard two things. One, he won the election anyway. Two, he's a Christian.

Patheos.com, a non-denominational, non-partisan online media company providing information and commentary from various religious and nonreligious perspectives, published an article entitled:

“Greg Gianforte is what toxic Christianity looks like”

Greg Gianforte is ... a fundamentalist Christian activist who funded the creationist Dinosaur and Fossil Museum in Glendive, Montana, which “proudly presents its exhibits in the context of biblical history,” showing human interactions with dinosaurs and things of that nature. Gianforte is also on the board of the Association of Classical and Christian Schools. In a 2015 address to the Montana Bible College, Gianforte said that the concept of retirement isn't biblical because Noah worked on his ark when he was 600 years old.

Greg Gianforte is what toxic Christianity looks like. Its white nationalism wrapped in a tokenistic use of the Bible and the sexual puritanism built on the patriarchal defense of white women's purity against horny black men from Emmett Till to today's rapper thugs. This is what it's always been about, even though for the past four decades, it pretended to be about family values.

[http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2017/05/25/greg-gianforte-toxic-christianity-looks-like/?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=FBCP-PRX&utm\\_content=mercynotsacrifice](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2017/05/25/greg-gianforte-toxic-christianity-looks-like/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=FBCP-PRX&utm_content=mercynotsacrifice)

Being a Christian – for those of us who like to call ourselves “Progressive” – means putting as much light between the Greg Gianfortes of the world and ourselves. That does not mean wishing G-d's punishment upon them. It means BEING a different kind of Christian and making it clear that we ARE Christian and not like Gianfortes brand of Christian. It means not body-slamming them back – but choosing the high road.

I am relying on the mentors and role models I've had over a lifetime to regulate my behavior. On this Memorial Sunday let's all remember those Saints of the Church and Ancestors in Spirit who have called out and reminded us to be our best selves.

And let's rely on each other in this present moment. Perhaps we can keep each other accountable for our behavior – even for our thoughts and desires.

Perhaps we can pray for each other's souls – even as we pray for the souls of those who seem to wield power like a weapon against the vulnerable and powerless.

Let us light as many candles as we can – to defy and define the darkness – to send up our prayers for one another and our world.

Let us melt the wax of our own hearts – and allow that same fire to melt the hearts of those who could so easily be our enemies.

Let us allow G-d to unfold the consequences of all of our choices.

[Light a candle] Amen.

**Scripture Reading for Sunday May 28, 2017 – Easter 7 – Year A**

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**Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35**

1 Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. **2 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. 3 But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.** 4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds--his name is the LORD-- be exultant before him. 5 Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. 6 God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land. 7 O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, Selah 8 the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel. 9 Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished; 10 your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy...

32 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord, Selah. 33 O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. 34 Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies. 35 Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel; he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!